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Commentary

Primary and Secondary Lactose Intolerance: A Genetic Disorder

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DESCRIPTION

Lactose intolerance is a common digestive disorder that affects millions of people worldwide. It is estimated that up to 75% of the global population is lactose intolerant to some degree. This condition occurs when the body is unable to digest lactose, a type of sugar found in milk and dairy products. *Lactobacillus acidophilus* is a probiotic that helps in reduction of lactose intolerance. Lactose intolerance is caused by a deficiency of lactase, an enzyme produced in the small intestine. Lactase is responsible for breaking down lactose into glucose and galactose, which can then be absorbed into the bloodstream. When lactase is deficient or absent, lactose remains undigested and passes into the large intestine. The undigested lactose then ferments, producing gas, and causing various digestive symptoms.

Lactose intolerance can be primary or secondary. Primary lactose intolerance is a genetic condition that is most common in people of African, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American descent. It is usually diagnosed in adulthood and is a result of the natural decline of lactase production as we age. Secondary lactose intolerance is caused by a medical condition that affects the small intestine, such as celiac disease, Crohn's disease, or chemotherapy. In these cases, lactose intolerance may be temporary or permanent, depending on the underlying condition.

The symptoms of lactose intolerance vary from person to person and depend on the degree of lactase deficiency. Common symptoms include bloating, gas, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and nausea. Symptoms usually appear within 30 minutes to 2 hours after consuming dairy products. Some people may also experience symptoms outside the digestive system, such as headaches, fatigue, and joint pain.

Diagnosis

Lactose intolerance is diagnosed based on symptoms and medical history. A healthcare professional may also recommend a lactose intolerance test, which involves drinking a liquid that contains lactose and measuring your blood sugar levels over time. If the blood sugar levels do not rise after drinking the lactose solution, it suggests that the body is not digesting lactose appropriately.

Another diagnostic test is a hydrogen breath test, which measures the amount of hydrogen in breath. When lactose ferments in the large intestine, it produces hydrogen gas, which is absorbed into the bloodstream and expelled through the breath. If breath contains high levels of hydrogen, it suggests that body is not digesting lactose correctly.

Treatment

The treatment of lactose intolerance involves avoiding or reducing dairy products in diet. This can be challenging, as lactose is present in many foods, including milk, cheese, yogurt, and ice cream. However, there are many lactose-free or low-lactose alternatives available, such as lactose-free milk, soy milk, almond milk, and lactose-free cheese. Intake of lactase supplements, which contain the enzyme lactase and help to break down lactose in the digestive system. These supplements are available over the counter in the form of tablets, capsules, or drops. They should be taken just before consuming dairy products. It is important to note that lactose intolerance is not the same as a milk allergy. Milk allergy is an immune system response to the proteins in milk and can cause severe allergic reactions, such as anaphylaxis. People with a milk allergy should avoid all dairy products, not just those containing lactose

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